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ABSTRACT

Three areas have become focal points in the restructuring movement: achievement, equity, and school-based governance. Restructuring efforts are initiated from four main sources--national and regional reform projects, state initiatives, district strategies, and individual school efforts. The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools is engaged in a 5-year program of research and dissemination that will analyze restructuring along 6 issues pivotal to elementary, middle, and high schools: authentic achievement, educational equity, decentralization, communities of learning, reflective dialogue, and accountability. This document encourages education writers to submit accounts of local school restructuring efforts. It offers questions to help stimulate story ideas on different aspects of restructuring. The questions for individual schools are related to the three areas of achievement, equity, and school-based governance. The questions for the district pertain to goals, process, budget, and staff development. A list of selected contacts--professional associations and organizations on school restructuring and education writing--is included. (LMI)

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Brief to education writers

ED 378 683

Introduction to School Restructuring Issues

Restructuring is education's hot topic for the nineties. How can the United States overhaul its educational system in order to produce leaders, workers, and citizens to face the challenges of the 21st century? The cry to restructure schools, rebuild curriculum and assessment, redesign teacher training, find new forms of business and community support and set student expectations on a higher plane responds to the dismal state of the American public school.

Why write about restructuring? Despite nearly universal criticism of schools, some bold new strategies are being tried. Teachers, administrators, and policymakers are taking risks to test new hypotheses and reach their goals. Three areas have become focal points in the restructuring movement: Achievement, Equity, and School-based Governance.

What exactly is restructuring? Restructuring refers to **major departures from conventional practice designed to foster critical thinking and high academic performance from all students.**

Usually restructuring efforts are discussed by referring to scattered experiments across the country. These are initiated from four main sources. We mention just a few examples. **(1) National and regional reform projects.** Organizations that work with schools include the Coalition of Essential Schools, established through Brown University; the Accelerated Schools Program, associated with Stanford University; and, the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, at Columbia University's Teachers College. **(2) State initiatives.** Kentucky and Minnesota offer examples of different approaches to statewide reform. **(3) District strategies.** Examples of district efforts can be found in Chicago, Illinois and Dade County, Florida. **(4) Individual school efforts.** For examples, consult the organizations listed below or investigate schools in your own area.

The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools represents one effort to shed light on the process of school restructuring. The Center is engaged in a five year program of research and dissemination which will analyze restructuring along six pivotal issues for elementary, middle and high schools: authentic achievement, educational equity, decentralization, communities of learning, reflective dialogue, and accountability.

Each year the Center will produce two "Issue Reports." The first one, "A Framework for Restructuring Schools," which was recently distributed, introduces the Center and its research mission. Three "Briefs" will be targeted to selected audiences; each fall one such brief will be sent to education writers. Future briefs will delve more deeply into a specific topic. Our goal is to suggest issues for local stories on restructuring. We would appreciate being sent a copy of any school restructuring stories you write.

What steps, strides, and success is your district having with restructuring? When you visit the schools (and classrooms) your district administrators say are restructured, you might ask: How evident are major changes to the educators involved? How evident are major changes to you–and the public at large.

If you have not written extensively on restructuring, we suggest the following questions to help stimulate story ideas on different aspects of restructuring. The questions relate to issues studied at the Center.

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"Education's job today is less in purveying information than in helping people to use it–that is, to exercise their minds."

Theodore R. Sizer
Educator

Questions for Individual Schools

Achievement and Assessment

Improved learning: Is improved achievement a stated goal? How do schools document student achievement? What do teachers and parents say about how well students are doing? What indications are there that student achieve ment has been enhanced by restructuring?

Instruction: What do teachers say about the way their teaching has changed to encourage in-depth learning? In class, do you see teachers pursuing "right" (or "already known") answers or are they asking open-ended questions? What percentage of time is spent on repetitive work, basic skills, discipline, procedures, and classroom management? What percentage of time is spent developing in-depth understanding of a topic? Ask teachers if and how they have raised expectations for student learning.

Changes in study and testing: How long do students work on in-depth projects–two days? two weeks? two months? What kinds of tests are being given–multiple choice? essay? Do teachers believe students are involved in the material they're studying?

Student interest: When interviewed do students say that what they are learning has value to them beyond getting a good grade.

Equity

Does tracking by ability level occur? What disparities exist in the achievement of low income and more affluent students–or between different racial or ethnic groups?

Instruction: Ask parents (or students) if they feel any group of students receives lower quality instruction. Do the "best" teachers teach all students, or just the most able?

School-based Governance

How much say do teachers, students, and parents have in different aspects of school life: curriculum, testing, budget, staffing, discipline, student affairs? Is the school governed by a site-based council or other committees? What kinds of decisions are made by which groups of people?

In what ways does the district (or state) support or stifle innovation? Are teachers given release time to carry out new responsibilities?

Questions for the District

Goals

Is there a district plan for restructuring schools? To what extent does the plan focus on the three goals of achievement, equity, and school-based governance? How far has the district progressed in developing and implementing its plans?

Process

Has restructuring been imposed from above by governors, state officers, or superintendents? What efforts are underway to decentralize control, from the administration to the schools? Is emphasis placed on shared decision-making in the schools?

How much community agreement is there on goals? Are any special interest groups trying to thwart or dominate the process of restructuring? What is the role of the teacher's union?

What significance is placed on new forms of school accountability, such as new regulations, new forms of district assistance, or support to schools? What incentives (e.g. release time), rewards, and sanctions encourage school restructuring?

Budget

How has the budget changed to accommodate the three goals of restructuring listed above? Does the school board distribute resources equitably across all schools, including lower income areas?

Staff development

What professional development is offered to staff to clarify and work toward the restructuring goals listed above? Are local Schools of Education changing teacher preparation to accommodate restructuring philosophy? What efforts are underway to revamp licensing and certification for teachers in your area?

SELECTED CONTACTS

CENTER ON ORGANIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING OF SCHOOLS, an OERI research center, is studying issues of authentic achievement, equity, teacher empowerment, reflective dialogue and accountability. **Contact:** Fred Newmann or Gary Wehlage, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1025 W. Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706 (608/ 263-7575).

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL REFORM promotes partnerships between local business communities and school districts nationwide through staff development. **Contact:** Phillip Schlechty or Bob Cole, 950 Breckenridge Lane, Suite 200, Louisville, KY 40207 (502/ 895-1942).

THE CENTER FOR RESTRUCTURING furthers restructuring by working with individual schools and school districts and by doing research and development on restructuring projects. **Contact:** co-directors Bruce Goldberg or Marsha Levine, American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001 (202/ 879-4440).

COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS, a high school university partnership established with Brown University, is committed to redesigning pedagogies, curricula, and school structures. With the Education Commission of the States, the Coalition created a nationwide program for school improvement, Re:Learning, which is intent on restructuring educational systems across the nation. **Contact:** Ted Sizer, Director, Coalition of Essential Schools, P.O. Box 1938, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912 (401/ 863-3384).

CONSORTIUM FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION investigates the relationship between and influences of educational policies and educational practice. **Contact:** Susan Fuhrman, Director of The Policy Center, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 90 Clifton Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (908/ 828-3872).

EDUCATION WRITERS ASSOCIATION, is an association dedicated to assisting reporters, editors, and other education writers. **Contact:** Anne Lewis, Lisa Walker, or Bert Menninga, 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036, (202/ 429-9680).

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION and its program, the CENTER ON EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY, are focused on improving student performance. They are a networking organization which examines leadership strategies, critical standards for student performance, localized decision making, and commitment to change. **Contact:** Michael Cohen, Director of the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, 1341 G Street, NW, Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20005 (202/ 783-3668); or, Marc Tucker, President, National Center on Education and the Economy, 39 State Street, Suite 500, Rochester, NY 14614 (716/ 546-7620).

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION NCREST was created to document, support, connect, and make lasting the many restructuring efforts going on throughout the nation. Columbia University, Teacher's College. **Contact:** Linda Darling-Hammond or Ann Lieberman, Teacher's College, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, Box 86, New York, NY 10027 (212/ 678-4142).

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION supports schools involved in restructuring. They have established a computer network linking parents, teachers, administrators, professors, and students to discuss educational practice. **Contact:** Sharon Robinson or Sylvia Seidel, 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3290 (202/ 822-7783 ext. 7940).

NATIONAL GOVERNOR'S ASSOCIATION provides technical assistance to states and does research into state restructuring efforts as well as educational issues in general. They work with Congress and the Administration on educational policy issues. NGA is encouraging states to focus on systemic restructuring. **Contact:** Rae Bond, Public Affairs Director, NGA, 400 N. Capital Street, NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20001 (202/ 624-5331).

"Restructuring is (concerned with) changing the dynamics of interactions in the classroom to ensure higher expectations of both teachers and students."

Anne Lewis
Education Writer

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